

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

1.9
7-16-38
NATIONAL FOREST VACATIONS
Nantahala National Forest. North Carolina

A radio talk by Elizabeth S. Pitt, United States Forest Service, broadcast July 26, 1938, in the Department of Agriculture period, National Farm and Home Hour, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of 90 associated stations.

###

JOHN BAKER:

Well, now that vacation time is with us, we've been wanting to give you some glimpses from time to time of some of our National Forests. The National Forests are administered by the Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture, and I think you'll find them interesting not only as public recreation areas visited by upwards of 30 million people a year, but also as an important part of our national land use picture, contributing as they do a wide variety of social and economic services - such as watershed protection, wildlife conservation, and continuous timber production, with consequent stabilization of employment and community life dependent upon local wood-using industries. Today, Elizabeth Pitt of the United States Forest Service is in the studio, so that probably means we are going to have a National Forest report that will interest the ladies. Betsy, what is the map you have your head buried in?

ELIZABETH PITT:

It's a little National Forest recreation map, Mr. Baker. I have vacations on my mind. The weather we've had here lately would start anybody to thinking about the dim cool woods and a picnic by a lake --

BAKER:

Yes, but where are you going to find forests and lakes around here? Now if Wallace Kaddery were here, he'd tell you that out on the West Coast --

PITT:

Yes, I know. When a Westerner like Wallace comes East to live, it takes him years to find out that you can have a pretty good outdoor vacation in this part of the country if you just know where to look. Our oldest National Forests are in the West, of course, but we have some pretty good-sized ones in the East and the South too, and the mountains and lakes in them are not half bad. Today, I'd like to tell you and our Farm and Home friends something about the National Forests in the Southern Region of the Forest Service. A Region, you know, is one of our administrative units. We have ten Regions.

BAKER:

Well, go right ahead. How many National Forests are there in the Southern Regions? I am interested because I just got back a couple of weeks ago from a trip down that way.

PITT:

Oh, you have! Well, there are about thirty National Forests down there and you must have hit some of them.

(over)

BAKER:

I went through the Nantahala Gorge. Isn't that in one of the Forests?

PITT:

If you went through the Nantahala Gorge you passed right through a part of the Nantahala Forest. And that happens to be the particular National Forest I had in mind to tell about today.

BAKER:

Is that so? Well, why don't you tell our listeners something about that National Forest?

PITT:

I'd like to. Farm and Home Friends, the Nantahala National Forest in the Blue Ridge Mountains in Western North Carolina is a mountainous area of 400,000 acres. This is the National Forest in which a memorial forest to Joyce Kilmer was established in 1936, after the memorial committee had made a nation-wide study of the forested areas of the United States. You will run into it about 75 miles below Asheville, and you will see some real mountain scenery. It's different from the Western mountains, of course, but even a Westerner would sit up and take notice. You can get some exceptionally fine views of the Great Smoky Mountains on the way down. You will pass by the Cherokee Indian Reservation, and go through the Nantahala Gorge that Mr. Baker spoke of. This Gorge will give you just as big a thrill as many of the Western gorges and the soft blue haze over the mountains will be something new to lots of people. I've never seen that anywhere except in the Southern Appalachians.

On one of the main routes to Atlanta, Georgia, you go through the Nantahala National Forest by way of Franklin, North Carolina. From there you can take some beautiful trips into the Forest. There are probably 500 miles of motor roads and hiking trails. Of course this Forest was established primarily to protect important watersheds and produce timber, but it offers excellent opportunities for outdoor recreation, and the Forest Service encourages people to use it for camping, fishing, and hiking. Such use does not interfere with the other purposes for which it was created. As a matter of fact, all these uses dovetail together under what the Forest Service calls multiple purpose management, and the Nantahala National Forest furnishes the timber that helps to keep a number of local industries going. Last year it provided employment on the Forest itself for about 1,000 persons. At the same time it had 38,000 visitors who brought in new business for stores, gas stations, tourists homes, and other local enterprises which depend on travelers.

Nearly everyone who goes to the Franklin gateway to the Nantahala National Forest drives out to Wayah Bald. This is a peak nearly 5,000 feet high, and from its summit you can look over the mountain ranges into four States -- North Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia, and South Carolina. The only other place I know of that you can do that is in Southwestern Colorado.

The name "Wayah Bald" makes me think of the Cherokee legend explaining the origin of the balds in the Southern Mountains. You know "bald" is the name for the treeless mountain tops that are characteristic of the mountains down there. Scientists have never been able to arrive at a satisfactory explanation of why

trees don't grow on these tiny isolated meadows on the mountain tops. All sorts of legends about this mystery have grown up, but the most interesting is that of the Cherokee Indians.

Long ago when the Cherokee braves roamed those mountains, their peaceful villages were disturbed by the appearance of a terrible monster with long sharp claws and beady eyes. One day this beast plunged into a group of Indian children playing on the river bank and swooped away with one of the youngsters in his great claws. Rumors of similar raids came from other villages and after a long period of ceaseless watching, the den of the great beast was discovered in the inaccessible cliffs of a great mountain peak.

Two Indian braves climbed the tallest hemlocks and looked down in horror on a brood of young beasts to which the monster had been feeding the Indian children. Straight, smooth walls protected his den and the Indians could do nothing. In their despair they sought the aid of the Great Spirit and their prayers were answered. Early the next morning thunder roared from a clear sky and a bolt of lightning tore the ancient cliffs apart. Weird screams were heard as the monster and his brood were dashed to death on the rocks below.

For days the Indians gave thanks to the Great Spirit. During that time they received from him a promise that never again would trees grow on the mountain tops to hide such a fearful monster. And to this day no trees have grown in those open places on the tops of the Southern Appalachian Mountains.

BAKER:

Well, Betsy, you have told me lots of things I didn't know before about the Nantahala National Forest. Say, what do you do if you want to find out more about this place? Do you have a map or anything?

PITT:

So you really got interested, did you? Well, you just write to the United States Forest Service, Atlanta, Georgia. The Regional Forester down there will get it and he'll send you a prompt answer.

BAKER:

Farm and Home Friends, Elizabeth Pitt of the United States Forest Service has just told you something about the Nantahala National Forest in North Carolina. One day soon she's going to take us on the vacation trail northward for a glimpse of the White Mountain National Forest in New England.

###

